

P-PATCH COMMUNITY GARDENING PROGRAM

BEACON FOOD FOREST

What is the Beacon Food Forest?

It is a community-driven, community gardening project adopting a gardening technique that mimics a woodland ecosystem by substituting edible trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals. Fruit and nut trees make up the upper level, while berry shrubs, edible perennials, and annuals make up the lower levels. It is located in the Beacon Hill neighborhood on the Jefferson Park reservoir (15 Ave S. and S. Dakota St).

Why is this project important?

As the first large-scale public food forest, this garden has captured the imaginations of people all around the world with visions of how communities can come together in urban places to grow food and revitalize the landscape using community gardening and permaculture practices.

What is the role of the City of Seattle in this project?

The project is a part of the [Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#) P-Patch Community Gardening Program. Major construction of the food forest was managed by P-Patch Program staff using **\$100,000** from the 2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy. P-Patch staff helped the volunteers with community organization and engagement, along with leadership development during the design and build process. Staff continues to provide ongoing support for the project.

The community design process and construction of the community gathering features were supported with two separate [Neighborhood Matching Fund](#) (NMF) awards totaling **\$108,295**. The NMF staff provided support as well.

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) owns the property of the food forest. It has made 1.75 acres available for this initial phase of the project with the possibility of expanding the farm in the future if interest and community engagement will support it. SPU staff reviewed the plans and worked with the volunteers to ensure the project was feasible on this site.

In addition, the project receives support from **Seattle Parks and Recreation** which frequently delivers gardening materials and from the **Office of Arts and Culture** that encourages artists to collaborate with the project. The **Department of Planning and Development** provided special support to the community as the project went through permitting. In general, hundreds of City staff hours have gone toward this project to help make it a reality.

How was the community involved in this project?

This project is a grassroots effort, initiated and driven by community members. A small group of friends and neighbors initiated the idea of a food forest in this location. With funds and support from Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, the group launched a community design process and invited neighbors and permaculture enthusiasts from around the region to participate. Hundreds of people have been involved in all aspects of its vision, design, and construction. Hundreds more have participated in work parties to build the food forest with tasks ranging from spreading woodchips to installing a water system. When complete, community volunteers will be responsible for stewarding and maintaining the garden.



What else is cool about the Beacon Food Forest?

The Beacon Food Forest will combine aspects of native habitat rehabilitation with edible forest gardening. When complete, it will have:

- Edible arboretum with fruits gathered from regions around the world
- Berry patch for canning, gleaning and picking
- Nut grove with trees providing shade and sustenance
- Garden plots for vegetable growing
- Gathering plaza for celebration and education
- Bee hives for pollination and honey
- Kids' area for education and play
- Living gateway to connect and serve as portals as residents meander through the forest

Can anyone harvest from the food forest?

With the excitement this project has generated, it's clear that the idea of a garden where gleaning and grazing is free and open to all is intriguing and inspiring to many. The Beacon Food Forest has three main priorities:

1. Create a community around food
2. Educate the community about growing food
3. Regenerate the land

Where its visionaries stress the many benefits of the project to the community beyond just the harvest, they echo the P-Patch Program's emphasis on the "community" in community gardening.

Once these goals are met, then attention turns to the harvest. The plan is to produce an abundance of food so that "ethical" harvesting from the collective areas will be available to all. By "ethical harvesting," it means taking only what a person needs without damaging the plant. Signs on the site will provide guidelines for harvesting. Some areas of the garden will not be available for open gleaning. In addition, volunteers will work together in organized ways to harvest and share the food with the broader community.

How long did it take to design and build the food forest?

This garden is still under development. Major construction began in the late winter of 2013. Earthmoving and grading was done by the Seattle Conservation Corps, a job training program of the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department. The rest of the food forest has been built by volunteer labor. Regular work parties are underway now. Much of the food forest will be planted this fall and the annual vegetable beds will be available for gardeners early in the spring of 2014. Even after the plants are growing, it will take several years for the trees to bear fruit. In the meantime, berries, herbs, pollinator plants, and annual vegetables will grow and produce.

Information on the [P-Patch Community Gardening Program](#)

As part of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, the P-Patch Community Gardening Program is made up of many different public community gardens throughout Seattle's neighborhoods. Community gardeners care for small plots of land, individually and collectively, to grow organic food, flowers, fruits, and herbs. Together, they also care for common areas in the gardens. Many community gardens have large shared areas dedicated to growing food for donation. Presently there are 85 P-Patch community gardens, 2,750 plots, and 6,300+ gardeners.

P-Patch community gardens are open to the public to enjoy. Each community garden is different and reflects its surrounding neighborhood and the volunteers who care for it. Their amenities may include picnic areas, benches, art, flower gardens, educational signage, sustainability demonstrations, and children's gardens. Gardens are built on property owned by various city departments and other public and private owners.

Learn more about P-Patch Community Gardening Program at www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch.
Learn more about the Beacon Food Forest at the community's website: <http://beaconfoodforest.org/>